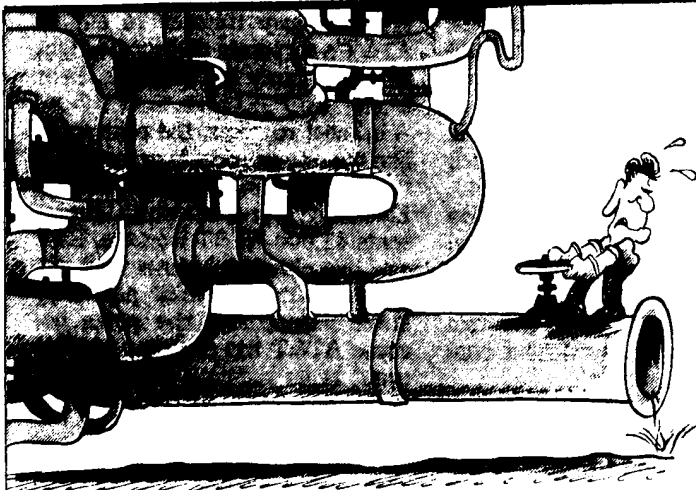


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Drip, Drip, Drip

The administration's current concern over leaks and leakers may be sincere and urgent; it is also part of a timeless Washington ritual. Plumbing problems have troubled every administration in recent memory, along with panics over the national security. Consider this sampling:

July 12, 1978: *"Carter: Intelligence Leaks Harming Security"*—President Carter complained to a congressional delegation yesterday that leaks of classified information are hampering intelligence-gathering efforts and damaging national security." (Washington Post)

Feb. 6, 1979: "This leaking has got to stop. . . . If there are any leaks out of your area, whatever the area may be, I am going to fire you. Whether or not that's fair, and I can see where some of you might not think it fair, this has just got to stop." (Jimmy Carter to a meeting of 16 high-ranking State Department officials; reported in The Post.)

July 16, 1980: "The amount of leaking is now at an all-time high . . . on security subjects." (Unidentified State Department official to Post reporter)

Feb. 18, 1976: *"Ford Asks Intelligence Disclosure Curb"*—President Ford proposed legislation today that would make it a serious crime for Government employees to disclose the ways in which the CIA and other federal agencies collect and evaluate their information. . . . Mr. Ford's statement began . . . with sharp criticism of leaks of information." (New York Times)

June 17, 1976: "There does seem to be a continuing series of leaks of alleged information or partial information. . . . The President doesn't feel it's in the national interest to spew out unclear bits and pieces of incomplete information every day." (Ford press secretary Ron Nessen, quoted in The New York Times)

April 21, 1973: *"Justice Department Bill Asking New Code for Prosecuting Classified Leaks"*—The Justice Department is asking Congress to approve a new system for prosecuting persons who leak classified information . . . to solve the security problem posed by leaks." (New York Times)

Jan. 18, 1972: *"Nixon Acts to End Security Leaks; Bids Staff Halt Disclosures From 'Policy Discussions'"*—President Nixon has instructed his subordinates to make stronger efforts to prevent leaks of information on national security matters, the White House said today." (New York Times)

June 29, 1966: *"FBI Opens Inquiry in Leak on Bombing"*—The Federal Bureau of Investigation, on President Johnson's orders, has opened an intensive inquiry into whether United States officials informed newsmen in advance about the decision to expand the bombing in North Vietnam to oil facilities in the Haiphong-Hanoi area. . . . It was understood that a prime purpose of the current inquiry was to guard against future 'leaks.'" (New York Times)

June 24, 1965: *"Johnson and News 'Leaks': President's Strong Opposition Is Seen Inhibiting News Coverage"*—News 'leaks' have always vexed a president . . . but Mr. Johnson's annoyance is of historic proportions. [There are] reports, widely credited in Washington, that press forecasts impelled him to cancel at least one non-urgent appointment he had decided to make, at least one major policy he had decided to invoke; and to defer two other appointments at the expense of the anguish of the expectants. . . . There is substantial evidence he is determined his ship of state shall be caulked with unexampled tightness against news leaks, large or small, harmless or troublesome." (New York Times)

May 29, 1964: *"Pentagon Reinforces Check on News Flow"*—The Pentagon's information chief has issued a new order designed to give him greater knowledge about which Defense officials are talking with reporters and what they are talking about. . . . The new order calls for weekly reports to [Assistant Defense Secretary Arthur Sylvester's] office 'on interviews granted by departmental personnel at the seat of Government.'" (Post)

March 3, 1961: *"News Leak Crackdown Ordered by McNamara"*—Defense secretary Robert S. McNamara has ordered a crackdown on military 'leaks' and tightening of Pentagon internal security practices. . . . His action followed White House and State Department statements of displeasure over such news leaks." (Post)

Continued

May 13, 1958: "State Dept. Reported Drafting News Curbs—

State Department executives are reported drafting a directive on press relations which would regulate and limit contacts between news reporters and many Department officials. . . . Informants said the new instructions are not intended to constitute a gag rule, but are designed rather to prevent unauthorized and possibly damaging leaks of news about the conduct of foreign relations." (Post)

Aug. 14, 1956: "Wilson Forms Special Committee to Plug 'Leaks' of Military Data—Defense Secretary Charles E. Wilson yesterday said secret military documents have been falling into the hands of 'unauthorized persons' for several months. He set up a special committee to plug the 'leaks'. . . . Wilson said he was 'seriously concerned over the unauthorized disclosure of classified military information.' Declaring 'this must stop,' he asked [committee chairman Charles] Cooledge to . . . 'eliminate this threat to national security.' " (Post)

Nov. 14, 1956: "Crackdown is Urged on Pentagon 'Leaks'"—A Pentagon advisory committee called yesterday for a crackdown on news 'leaks' of defense secrets by severe punishment of responsible military personnel and grand jury questioning of reporters involved. . . . The group, composed of high-ranking retired officers, was named by [Defense Secretary Charles E.] Wilson August 13 to seek means to stop defense 'leaks.' (Post. The report recommended curbs on trade and technical journal reporters, creation of a chief prosecutor for security leaks, establishment of three "courts of inquiry" on leaks, and regulation of all interviews with Defense Department personnel through the Office of Public Information.)

Jan. 26, 1953: "Leaks Irrk Ike—President Eisenhower is said to be edgy and angry about news leaks of his plans to the press and radio. A recent visitor described him as raging because word of political appointments had been peddled prematurely." (Washington Daily News)

Jan. 30, 1953: "Poor Ike! . . . In saying that any official peddler of the inside dope will be purged, he ought to know what he is up against." (Post, editorial.)

The writer is a member of the editorial page staff.